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ABSTRACT

Although the Underground Railroad has been an integral part of U.S. history and folklore for well over 150 years, the recent past has seen an increased public interest in the identification of historic sites associated with the experiences of fugitive slaves. This booklet is part of a National Park Service initiative to design research methods which address U.S. history in a more integrated, diverse, and complex way. Following an introduction, the booklet is divided into Part I Historic Context for the Underground Railroad; Part II Using Primary Sources: The Historians' Toolbox; and Part III Tracking Escape: A Case Study. It concludes with a narrative review of sources. (BT)

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R.M. GREENBERG

EXPLORING A COMMON PAST

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Researching and Interpreting the Underground Railroad

1998

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INTRODUCTION

Although the Underground Railroad has been an integral part of American history and folklore for well over 150 years, the recent past has seen an increased public interest in the identification of historic sites associated with the experiences of fugitive slaves. Since the late 1960s, many researchers have utilized the perspectives and methodologies of archeologists, anthropologists, social historians, and material culture to focus on the lives and communities of enslaved and free Americans. Their methods permit historic site administrators, interpreters, and members of the general public to create more meaningful, inclusive, and documented accounts of the Underground Railroad. Because historic sites play a critical role in interpreting our national heritage to a broad audience, it is important that public historians supplement oral narratives and legends of the Underground Railroad with documentation that supports local accounts and places the Underground Railroad in a broader context of slavery and American history.

Researching and Interpreting the Underground Railroad is the second in a series of guides designed to help National Park Service staff, members of the public, and administrators of historic properties produce, review and evaluate interpretive programs and media. This booklet includes a brief contextual statement about North American slavery, a review of historical scholarship about the Underground Railroad and related topics, suggestions for using a variety of sources to construct responsible and meaningful interpretations, and examples of how to use these sources and to document and interpret specific cases of Underground Railroad activity.

This booklet is part of a National Park Service initiative to design research methods which address American history in a more integrated, diverse, and complex way. For general information about recent goals and directions of the National Park Service, see *Revision of the National Park Service's Thematic Framework* (1996) and *Adapting to Change* (1996).

PART I

HISTORIC CONTEXT FOR THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

Defining the "Underground Railroad"

The Underground Railroad refers to the effort –sometimes spontaneous, sometimes highly organized – to assist persons held in bondage in North America to escape from slavery. While most runaways began their journey unaided and many completed their self-emancipation without assistance, each decade in which slavery was legal in the United States saw an increase in the public perception of an underground network and in the number of persons willing to give aid to the runaway. Although this study encompasses the period from American independence to the end of the Civil War (1770s to 1865), it focuses on the years between 1820 and 1865 when most antislavery advocates abandoned their hope for gradual emancipation and adopted immediate abolition of slavery as their goal. Although divided on this issue, the abolitionist movement was successful in expanding and publicizing the informal network known as the underground railroad.

The term "underground railroad" had no meaning to the generations before the first rails and engines of the 1820s, but many earlier events were precursors of the underground railroad. This study includes incidents which have all the characteristics of underground railroad activity but which occurred before 1820. These activities foreshadowed and helped to shape the underground railroad. While the primary focus will be on the most active period of underground railroad activity, it is important to document earlier and related events which contribute to an understanding of this nationally-significant, geographically-widespread enterprise.

The origin of the term cannot be precisely determined although there are several claims for the honor. What is known is

that both those who aided escapes from slavery and those who were outraged by loss of slave property began to refer to runaways as part of an "underground railroad" by the 1830s. The "underground railroad" described an activity that was locally organized, but which had no real national center. It existed rather openly in the North and just beneath the surface of daily life in the upper South and certain Southern cities. Where it existed, the underground railroad offered local service to runaway slaves by assisting them from one point to another. Farther along, others would take the passenger into their transportation system until the final destination had been reached.

The rapidity with which the term became commonly used did not mean that incidents of resistance to slavery increased significantly around 1830 or that more attempts were made to escape from bondage. It did mean, however, that more white Americans were prepared to aid runaways and to give some assistance to the free blacks who had always made it their business to help fugitive slaves. Publication of the first issue of William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper, *The Liberator*, on January 1, 1831, marks the traditional beginning of the abolitionist era and of angry and defensive responses from the slaveholding South. The high visibility of the abolitionist attack on slavery has perhaps encouraged historians to overemphasize the abolitionist involvement with the underground railroad.

Several factors less frequently emphasized are noted in this booklet. First, there were active attempts at escape from slavery in North America during the late 1600s and the 1700s, both individual and in groups. By the 1800s, various forces, from the national Constitution to local slave patrols in the South, were all aligned to prevent escapes. A second factor is that, while most slave escapes were to the free states of the North and to Canada, there were runaways into Spanish Florida and into Spanish Mexico and the subsequent Mexican Republic. Although the numbers escaping never threatened to destabilize slavery, there were very serious consequences for American diplomacy, prompting a desire to acquire Spanish territory on the continent to secure the national borders and prevent slave escapes. A third factor is that the

majority of assistance to runaways came from slaves and free blacks and the greatest responsibility for providing shelter, financial support, and direction to successful runaways came from the organized efforts of northern free blacks.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the underground railroad is that its importance is not measured by the number of attempted or successful escapes, but by the manner in which it consistently exposed the grim realities of slavery and ~more importantly~ refuted the claim that African Americans could not act or organize on their own behalf. It also encouraged, however uneasily at times, men and women of both races to begin to set aside assumptions about the other race and to work together on issues of mutual concern. At its most dramatic, the underground railroad provided stories complex communication systems and individual acts of bravery and suffering. While most of the accounts of secret passageways, sliding wall panels, and hidden rooms will never be documented with historical evidence, there were indeed sufficient dramas to be interpreted and verified.

The Origins of American Slavery

The Atlantic slave trade, which carried unwilling Africans to the Western Hemisphere, was one part of a long history of international trade in goods and people in Europe, Africa, North and South America, and even Asia. Between 1450 and 1850, about 12 million Africans were transported westward across the Atlantic. Of this number, only about five percent were brought to British North America and, later, to the United States, most of them arriving between 1680 and 1808. It is estimated that between 450,000 and 600,000 Africans arrived in North America in waves of forced migration that coincided with changes in military power or commercial advantage in Africa, Europe or America.

When Europe, Africa, and the Americas made early contact for trade and exploration, it was not certain what the status of either Africans or Europeans would be in the Americas. That status varied from Mexico to Brazil to the Carolinas to New Amsterdam. The

development of slavery in the Chesapeake Bay region in the 1600s exemplified the manner in which a plantation economy, based on one-crop (tobacco) commercial agriculture, developed a legal system that validated slavery. For the first few decades, some Africans were treated as indentured servants and freed after a term of service, often fourteen years. By the 1640s, court decisions began to reflect a different standard for Africans than for white servants and to accept the concept of lifetime black servitude. In the 1660s, Virginia decreed that a child followed the status of its mother, thus making lifetime servitude inheritable. A series of court decisions from the 1660s forward locked slavery into place in the Chesapeake.

While British North America received few slaves and most of those in the 1700s, it was deeply involved in the slave trade which began to be dominated by British shipping in the 1700s. For much of the eighteenth century, Britain's prosperity was involved with the purchase, capture and export of slaves from western Africa to the European colonies of the Western Hemisphere. Colonial slaves, recently arrived from Africa or the Caribbean, often believed that they could escape from the system of slavery and start their own community. Since the British colonies in North America were not yet "free," their only recourse was to cross an international border, pass themselves as free in a new region, or live outside colonial society with Native Americans or in "maroon" societies.

Maroon societies were bands or communities of fugitive slaves who succeeded in establishing a society of their own in some geographic area, such as swamp or mountain, usually difficult to penetrate. While the colonial era saw attempts at group escape, by the time of the American republic, such unsettled refuges were fewer. Further, the North American back country was already inhabited by Native Americans who sometimes accepted Africans into their communities, sometimes kept them in slavery, and sometimes returned them to their masters. Finally, Africans learned that they were more likely to be recaptured if they ran away in large groups.

Early Antislavery in America

When British North America severed ties with England, the slave trade between West Africa, the British West Indies, and North America was disrupted. Since the Americans had argued for natural rights in their Declaration of Independence, there was some sentiment for ending the slave trade, although less political will for ending slavery. The Constitutional compromise of 1787 put an end to the slave trade by 1808, but the Constitution and the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793 confirmed the rights of slaveholders to their property.

The early antislavery movement and examples of resistance to slavery from the eighteenth and early nineteenth century are the immediate precursors of the underground railroad. These include the early abolition societies (1780s-1812) which were present in almost every state and the religious antislavery movement which began in the 1700s. The Society of Friends (Quakers) provided much of the antislavery leadership, early and late, but other denominations as well as Enlightenment political philosophies contributed to the antislavery movement. Free blacks in every state made political and economic efforts to encourage emancipations, to end the slave trade, and, ultimately, to abolish slavery in the new American republic. Also among the precursors to the underground railroad are African American war-related efforts to leave the United States during the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, to sue for freedom on the basis of military service in these wars, and to organize slave rebellions based on belief in republican liberty, as in the Stono Rebellion (1739) and Gabriel's Conspiracy (1800.)

In much of the North, the end of legal slaveholding came with the adoption of new state constitutions after the American Revolution. Most northern states adopted gradual abolition plans that could take a long time; it could mean that children served to age thirty or that old persons remained in bondage if it appeared that they would have to be supported by the state. In addition, the first national Congress in 1787 passed the Northwest Ordinance which prohibited the introduction of slaves into the territory west of the

Ohio River. This area, which became the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin was permanently free. The belief that slavery was a moral evil and the hope, held widely in the north and south during the early republic, that somehow the slavery issue might resolve itself as the American economy changed and as slaveholders were persuaded of the evils of slavery, evaporated as slaves became more valuable and after the bitter Congressional fight over the admission of Missouri to the Union as a slave state in 1820. It was, as Thomas Jefferson, claimed, "a firebell in the night."

The Underground Railroad Era 1820-1860

Thousands of slaves fled bondage each year in the decades before the Civil War. The most frequent calculation is that around one thousand per year actually escaped. Some runaways sought a brief respite from slavery or simply wanted to reach family and friends. Other fugitives settled in southern towns and cities, often with forged "free" papers. The majority of slaves attempting to escape from the South went to the North and many continued to Canada. Some runaways returned to their masters and others were caught by bloodhounds and slave patrols, accidents and informants. For those who attempted to reach the North, assistance from black and white abolitionists and other sympathizers may have become more frequent and certainly became more obvious as the decades passed. Especially after 1830, there was an increased commitment to abolitionism, the formation of predominantly-black vigilance committees, and support for what came to be called the underground railroad.

Free blacks played the central role in aid to fugitive bondspeople and in the protection of free blacks likely to be kidnapped and sold in the South. In Northern cities they formed Vigilance Committees and filled the positions of officers. In the midwest, they provided refuge. Levi Coffin, celebrated as the "President of the Underground Railroad", left North Carolina and settled in Newport, Indiana, in 1826 where he noted that "fugitives often passed through that place and generally stopped among

the colored people." Coffin, originally from an antislavery Quaker family in North Carolina, was active in the underground railroad in both Indiana and Cincinnati, Ohio. Still, James G. Birney, while in Cincinnati, observed about the underground railroad that "such matters are almost uniformly managed by the colored people. I know nothing of them generally till they are past."

In 1832, the New England Anti-Slavery Society was formed and, within five years, it had several hundred local chapters primarily in Massachusetts, New York, and Ohio. In late 1833, Garrison allied with black and white abolitionists to form the American Anti-Slavery Society which had, as associate members, interracial female antislavery societies in Philadelphia and Boston. This Society also grew quickly and had almost a quarter of a million members by 1838. The American Anti-slavery Society divided at its 1840 convention when a woman, Abby Kelley, was elected to a committee. Garrison's group supported female participation and retained control of the much-reduced American Anti-Slavery Society. Seeing the deep involvement of the federal government in slavery from the Constitution onward, they advocated the dissolution of the Union as the only means of withdrawing Northern support from slavery and forcing emancipation. Most of the Garrisonians were pacifists who rejected all violent means of ending slavery. They were as suspicious of organized religion as they were of government and they explored utopian communities and women's rights for the next two decades.

Religiously-motivated abolitionists constituted a much larger group and were organized loosely into the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society from 1840 until the mid-1850s. Political abolitionists were closely aligned with the church-based group and were themselves divided into three regional factions. The most radical of these political abolitionists, who urged political action against slavery, was the faction organized around Gerrit Smith in upstate New York. They argued that the United States Constitution, properly interpreted, prohibited slavery in the states and that the federal government had the power to abolish slavery in the south. Another political faction, centered in Cincinnati, was part of the Liberty Party and then the Free Soil Party, both third-party

movements designed to force the major parties to end slavery. The third political group were Boston-area abolitionists who could not support Garrison. Most of the political abolitionists found their way into the new Republican Party, organized in 1854.

Black abolitionists, who had sought white allies, often felt that they were kept on the margins of the movement they had sustained and promoted. Increasingly, free blacks had their own meetings and read newspapers published by African Americans, such as Samuel Cornish's *Colored American* and *Frederick Douglass's Paper.* The argument over which set of abolitionist tactics was more productive sometimes obscures the fact that the abolitionist movement, with all its divisions, was extremely effective. It did much to bring the nation to a confrontation over slavery within thirty years.

It is virtually impossible to trace, with any precision, the routes that runaway slaves took overland to reach free states in the northeast and midwest. Legend and tradition, while insufficient evidence in themselves, can often be signposts that suggest where digging for further information may be most profitable. There were, indeed, southern whites who aided fugitive slaves. Their activities are much more shrouded in darkness than those of the white northerners who assisted fugitives. Such activity, in the south, brought severe punishment, even death. As early as the 1790s, there are accounts of whites who encouraged slave revolts in Virginia and the slave, Gabriel, who planned a wide conspiracy in Virginia in 1800, hid out for ten days on the river vessel of a white man and was betrayed by a black boatman. The examples of northern abolitionists who went south and then, either impulsively or with calculation, encouraged and abetted runaways, received more public notice than did the work of white southerners.

The decade of the 1850s was a dispiriting time for African Americans seeking freedom through the law or through a more personal form of self-liberation –running away. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 strengthened the original Act of 1793 and made it legal for slaveholders to pursue runaways into states where slavery was illegal. As a result, professional slave catchers seized black men

and women, often on the street or at their work place, and hastened them south after giving evidence that this person was indeed a fugitive slave to a local justice of the peace or court. Such evidence as the unsavory slave catchers had was often flimsy or false and, while the South won the legal victory, the Abolitionist cause won a larger victory when Northerners saw blacks struggling to escape from their captors. Many Northerners acquired a new understanding of the slave condition and a greater sympathy for the campaign to end slavery in the United States.

Still, the national government seemed to reflect the Southern view throughout the decade, partly through fear of Southern defection from the Union, partly from the central role of Southern politicians in national politics. In 1857, Supreme Court Justice Roger B. Taney declared, in the case of *Dred Scott v. Sandford* that blacks "had no rights which the white man was bound to observe." This meant that that the status of free blacks was entirely up to the individual states. John Brown's 1859 raid on Harper's Ferry was a desperate attempt to inspire slaves to rebellion because all other avenues to national manumission seemed closed.

In this atmosphere, the Civil War began as a war to save the Union from the ever-expanding contradictions inherent in a nation "half slave, half free." But, no sooner had Union troops appeared in the border states, on the islands off the Atlantic coast, and in the lower Mississippi Valley, than thousands of blacks took the opportunity to liberate themselves by absconding to the Yankee camps. A first effort to send them back to their masters was soon abandoned. The runaways became "contraband," or confiscated property of war. Many of them quickly found work within the Union lines and members of their families began to join them. At the same time, Northern blacks who sought to form companies and join the Army were initially rebuffed.

The Confederacy was also quick to see the advantages of such labor. Free blacks were conscripted to dig fortifications for the southern army and to labor on roads and in mines. Slaves accompanied their masters to army camp and acted as cooks, grooms, and personal attendants. Early in the war, slaveholders hired out their

slaves to the army but, when slaves availed themselves of the chance to change sides, slaveholders decided to send their slaves to interior plantations, far away from the battles.

This enormous upheaval and movement of the black population within the South created unprecedented opportunities for self-liberation which took place even before the federal government acknowledged the reality. In July, 1862, after the disastrous Peninsular campaign, President Lincoln issued the Second Confiscation Act stating that the Union could "employ . . . persons of African descent . . . for the suppression of the rebellion." The entry of African American units into the Union Army and the encampment of thousands of contrabands in and near the Union Army constitutied a de facto emancipation even before the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect on the first of January, 1863.

The war to save the Union inevitably became the war to free the slaves, not just to secure African Americans soldiers, weaken the Confederacy, and acquire the approval of Europe, especially Britain, but also because African Americans themselves used every opportunity to demonstrate that, once slavery's chain was cracked, it would never be repaired.

PART II

USING PRIMARY SOURCES: THE HISTORIANS' TOOLBOX

Researching the Underground Railroad

Where do we find evidence for a historical phenomenon that was, for the most part, unwritten and sometimes even unspoken? As Louis Gottschalk stated in *Understanding History* (1969):

> "Most human affairs happen without leaving vestiges or records of any kind behind them. The past, having happened, has perished with only occasional traces. To begin with, although the absolute number of historical writings is staggering, only a small part of what happened in the past was ever observed.... And only a small part of what was observed in the past was remembered by those who observed it; only a small part of what was remembered was recorded; only a small part of what was recorded has survived; only a small part of what has survived has come to historians' attention; only a part of what has come to their attention is credible; only a part of what is credible has been grasped; and only a part of what has been grasped can be expounded or narrated by the historian."

Although there is a great deal that we will never understand about the underground railroad, and although those involved in the effort were not always interested in leaving written evidence of their activities, they could not escape leaving footprints of their existence and activities in all kinds of ways. Researchers of the underground railroad thus have access to a rich "toolbox" of primary and secondary resources that can help them learn about and interpret the Underground Railroad as a theme in American history (and thus capitalized.) Locating names and ages in census records, identifying buildings and land owners on contemporary

maps, digging out court cases from county archives, finding the original membership list from an organization, and reading accounts of specific events in old newspapers are all ways of finding evidence to support Underground Railroad legends and stories.

Because the Underground Railroad story encompasses a wide variety of people, places, and events it is important to gather information from many sources in order to grasp its complexity. Whatever the driving force for research, Underground Railroad research often raises many unexpected and exciting questions. It is important to remember that the right questions remain more important than the right answers. The current task is not simply to identify places where fugitive slaves stayed while en route to freedom, but rather to find and interpret evidence of the complex story of slavery and resistance in American history.

Casting a Wide Net

For researchers in the Washington DC area, the **Library of Congress** has extensive material related to the Underground Railroad and the history of American slavery and abolition. The **Main Reading Room** provides access to tens of thousands of published books. Many fragile or unpublished sources are available in the **Rare Book and Special Collections** reading room. The **Local History and Genealogy** reading room is a treasure chest of local and county histories, family genealogies, city directories, published census records, references to unpublished collections and individual biographies, and reference guides for researching genealogy and local history. Both the **Geography and Maps** and **Prints and Photograph** divisions are worth a visit, for many local, regional, and national maps and nineteenth-century images are housed at the Library of Congress. The **Periodicals** reading room provides access to many contemporary publications and nineteenth-century newspapers from around the country. Those researching specific people, families, institutions, or organizations may want to scour the **Manuscript** reading room for information. Although the **Folklore and Folklife** reading room does not contain a great deal of material directly related to the Underground Railroad, it houses

collections of 1930s WPA Federal Writers' Project interviews with ex-slaves and numerous books of African American folklore and folksong. Although the **Music** division contains little about the Underground Railroad, it has materials related to the music of the anti-slavery movement in the early and mid-nineteenth century.

Make use of the numerous finding aids available in many of the reading rooms. The *African American Mosaic*, a published guide to African American research at the Library of Congress, is an extremely useful starting point for Underground Railroad research, and is online at http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/african/intro.html. While the reading rooms still use some card catalogs, most have access to LOCIS, the library's computerized catalogue system. Fortunately for distant researchers, a good bit of the library's collections are available through Firstsearch, on the library's website at <http://www.loc.gov>, and at the Gopher site MARVEL <marvel.loc.gov, port 70>. Before heading to the Library of Congress, peruse the electronic catalogs from a remote computer or call the telephone reference desk at (202) 707-5522 with specific questions.

The **National Archives** contains all the decennial census records that are available to the public ~1790 to 1820. Most of the United States Census records are indexed and available on microfilm in the **Microform** room. Unfortunately, researchers will not flip to a page in the 1850 census which lists "Underground Railroad" or "Fugitive Slave" as John Doe's occupation. Although census records will not prove that a person or site was involved in underground activities, they can be used to document a person's name, age, sex, family relationships, boarders and tenants, ethnicity and/or color, slave or free status, property value (in slaves, land, and personal property), educational level, occupation, proximate location to neighbors, and occasionally physical appearance. Military and pension records are often useful in conducting genealogical research. The *Guide to the National Archives of the United States* (1974) is a good overview of the basic record groups available for research. The National Archives has federal records centers in: Waltham, MA; Bayonne, NJ; Philadelphis, PA; East Point, GA; Chicago, IL; Dayton, OH; Kansas City, MO; Fort

Worth, TX; Denver, CO; San Bruno, CA; Laguna Niguel, CA; Seattle, WA. Much of the state-based material available at the National Archives is also available at state archives and libraries.

State Archives often have large collections relating to the history of the state, and frequently have many genealogical materials for particular families. Many state and county courts donate their archives to state facilities, as do businesses, institutions, schools, social organizations, and political groups. Some tax and military records are housed in state archives, and many of the best local maps and much local ephemera can be found here. Plantation account books, southern factory records, and church membership lists are sources for slaves' names often found in state archives. In some of those sources, a last name is included and family relationships are detailed.

For a detailed listing of the information available for each census year and specific considerations for researching nineteenth-century census records, see the "General Guide to Sources" in *National Register Bulletin 39: Researching a Historic Property* and *The Source* (1997) and the *Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives.*

Local libraries often have many materials about community and regional history and legend, as well as archives from local groups and organizations and personal collections. **Academic libraries** often have more materials about general history and particular topics, theories and studies, theses and dissertations, and sometimes special collections.

Check **museums and historical societies** for any materials relating to particular families, community involvement in slavery and the anti-slavery movement, local organizations and societies, personal collections, local and regional histories, unpublished manuscripts, periodicals and newspapers, ephemera, and images. Many local agencies also have collections relating to specific buildings and structures.

Using the Toolbox

Oral Tradition

Information and stories passed down through generations of families and communities are central to our understanding of fugitive slave experiences during the ante-bellum period. Oral tradition and folklore have played significant roles in African American history and contribute a great deal to our understanding of American culture and society. For decades - even centuries - historians have debated the use of oral tradition and individual memory in understanding the past. While some benevolent societies, vigilance committees, and prominent individuals kept written records of their activities, the majority of people involved in the Underground Railroad were not likely to leave paper trails of their activities or identify their underground contacts. The aiding and abetting of fugitive slaves in the United States during the nineteenth century was, after all, a highly controversial and illegal activity, punishable by fine, branding, incarceration, and enslavement. It is thus neither surprising nor accidental that we lack consolidated and detailed written records about the process. Oral tradition fills a great void in the largely unwritten history of the Underground Railroad, and can contain valuable references to names, dates, and locations, events, and connections which can be documented in written primary and secondary sources.

As historian Donald Richie asserts, "oral history is as reliable or unreliable as other research sources. No single piece of data of any sort should be trusted completely, and all sources need to be tested against other evidence." The task of the modern historian of the Underground Railroad is not to toss these sources aside, but to document them with other historical evidence and evaluate their usefulness and credibility on a case-by-case basis. Documenting and interpreting the Underground Railroad at historic sites involves many different methods and resources. Barbara Allen and Lynwood Montell's *From Memory to History: Using Oral Sources in Local Historical Research* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1981) is an excellent introduction to the uses and abuses of oral tradition for these purposes. David Kyvig and Myron

Marty, *Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You* 2nd. ed. (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1996), is an excellent introduction to conducting local history research and provides detailed examples of how primary sources can be used creatively in historical research.

Autobiography and Memoir

Fugitive slave narratives and ex-slave memoirs were an important form of public education from the 1830s to the 1860s as escaped slaves working with abolitionists began publishing dramatic accounts of escape from bondage. These published accounts circulated widely and their authors were asked to speak to the public at abolition meetings about their experiences. Some historians have claimed that in addition to containing debatable and exaggerated information, many of these narratives were edited, altered, or even written by abolitionists for political purposes. These limitations do not disqualify slave narratives as historical evidence. They simply suggest that historians must use such documents with caution, and evaluate their reliability by cross-referencing them with other primary sources. Slave narratives and memoirs are an important part of the historical record that must undergo the same rigorous evaluation as any other piece of evidence. Publication does not guarantee authenticity, and most narratives do not reveal process of editing, selection, and revision which may have altered the information in the text. When using these sources, it is therefore important to consider the perspective and motivation of the author (if known) and find out as much as possible about the history of the publication.

In the late nineteenth century, accounts of the Underground Railroad were published primarily by elderly abolitionists or members of their families to commemorate the efforts of abolitionists who helped fugitive slaves. These memoirs also have their limitations, and many contain exaggerated recollections. In many cases, however, aged abolitionists sought to create a reliable record of their ante-bellum lives. "Using Memoirs to Write Local History," an article in the November 1982 edition of *History News*, is a good introduction to these resources.

Archeology

Archeological resources are irreplaceable and non-renewable and evidence about the Underground Railroad always will be some of the most fragile material remains. The Underground Railroad, as a clandestine network, resulted in limited traditional historical evidence. Wide and varied non-specialist or public participation in archeological projects is very important, but these projects must have professional archeological supervision. Archeological investigation, conducted in coordination with oral history and primary document research, will lead to a broader understanding of the Underground Railroad, its related phenomena, and its operations throughout slave free states.

Since the widest range of places associated with the Underground Railroad are likely to remain only as archeological resources, it is critical that they be identified and evaluated according to their proper contextual relationships. This approach also will provide information on significant historical cultural landscapes. Use of resources for travel and subsistence, the varied creation of "stations" as integral parts of communities, and free settlement patterns are all examples of how cultural landscapes were transformed by the systematic efforts to provide for escapes from slavery.

Understanding Underground Railroad history requires multi-level analyses of such topics as plantations, free settlements, and maroon settlements. This research will provide insight into the conditions that led to escape, the lives of people following their escapes, and the social networks which promoted and assisted escape. African American archeology over the past 30 years has significantly increased our knowledge of the lifeways and culture history of African Americans, especially in undocumented early American contexts. Theresa Singleton and Mark Bograd produced a comprehensive bibliography of African American archeiology in *The Archeology of the African Diaspora in the Americas* [Guides to the Archeological Literature of the Immigrant Experience in America, Number 2 (Society for Historical Archaeology), 1995.]

Local Histories

Local histories range from the commercially-produced slick-paper products funded by community boosters to the very narrowly-focused history of a particular congregation or business or club within a region. Their usefulness also varies widely and their claims must be checked. These sources are usually only jumping-off points for more thorough historical research and should serve as complements, not substitutes, for other sources such as census records, court papers, maps, and county documents. Researchers should be critical in evaluating these sources, and take the author's perspective and possible biases into consideration. Information about local histories can be located by contacting your state archives and records management office, state historic preservation office, and the American Association of State and Local History. Researchers using the Library of Congress should consult the *United States Local Histories in the Library of Congress* (Baltimore: Magna Carta, 1975).

Scholarly Sources: books, articles, theses and dissertations, unpublished manuscripts

Interpreting the Underground Railroad in a broad historical context is often easier said than done. Many researchers and interpreters often lack the time and staff to conduct in-depth research about the historical development of an area, the sociology of local free black communities, or the development of the American abolition movement. Fortunately, many scholars have published books about these and many other subjects. After deciding on themes to include in a historic context, it is very useful to head to a local university library and scour the catalogues for scholarly books, dissertations and theses, and journal articles about these subjects. See the bibliography at the end of this booklet for an overview of scholarship on Underground Railroad themes.

County and Township Records

State and local archives often have collections of county records which include wills, property ownership deeds, property transfers, household probate inventories, bills of sale for slaves, emancipation

and manumission registers, slave registers for tax purposes, local and regional maps, legal documents and court records, and insurance records. County and state tax records are a wealth of information about the economic and geographical development of an area, and often contain references to many different people, places, and events.

City Directories, Almanacs, and Gazetteers

As the yellow pages of the nineteenth century, city directories, almanacs, and gazetteers are good sources for establishing historical context as well as documenting factual information. Whereas federal censuses were taken once a decade, directories were often published annually and updated their information from year to year. Although limited because slaves, married women, poor whites, and many southern free blacks are not generally included in these mid-nineteenth century listings, these documents often list the exact addresses of businesses and individuals, hotel occupants and boarders, business and commercial advertisements, schedules for local trains, steamships, and shipping companies, lists of local churches, associations, organizations, and newspapers, postage rates and post office box locations, lists of local politicians and officials, calendars, and city maps. Often, individuals who cannot be clearly identified in census records can be traced in city directories, and these listings are useful for pinpointing exact locations of sites and individuals which can then be plotted on contemporary maps. Many almanacs include important news from the previous year, and gazetteers often contain sections detailing local history, economic and demographic statistics, and social, economic, and political predictions.

The Library of Congress has an extensive collection of city directories housed in its Microform and Main Reading Rooms. In addition, many state and local archives keep local, regional, social, and business directories in their collections. Check with your local librarian or historian to locate these sources in your area, and remember to use them with caution: directories often contain many omissions and errors and should be cross referenced with other primary source materials.

Calendars

Contemporary calendars were often published in gazetteers, directories, and almanacs or in business advertisements. There are even some published collections of nineteenth-century calendars which are useful for verifying dates mentioned in Underground Railroad accounts and community, family, and personal events. If no contemporary calendars are available, perpetual calendars such as the one on page 103 of Graff and Barzun, *The Modern Researcher* can be extrememly helpful in piecing together Underground Railroad accounts.

Images and Photographs

Although the number of images and certainly the number of photographs directly related to the Underground Railroad is limited, researchers should keep an eye out for any bit of visual information available from the period. Be cautious about using paintings and illustrations done long afterward, but they are not to be rejected, just identified as after the fact. Contemporary woodcut illustrations, architectural sketches, drawings by journalists, advertisements, logos, paintings, and pictures are all valuable pieces of evidence in local historical research.

Foreign Documents

When interpreting a historic site or individual associated with the Underground Railroad, it is important to incorporate any possible connections to people, places, and events in foreign countries. Because fugitive slaves resettled in foreign territories and were key figures in the mid-nineteenth century international anti-slavery movement, researchers must often expand their geographical lens and dig up information from foreign sources, especially Canadian.

Peter Ripley's *The Black Abolitionist Papers* is an excellent anthology of primary sources from black British, Canadian, and American abolitionists during the ante-bellum period (1820-1865). The Public Record Office in London contains legal papers relating

to fugitive slave cases, as well as sources which reflect connections between the British and American anti-slavery movements. Patricia Kennedy and Janine Roy's *Tracing Your Ancestors in Canada* (Public Archives of Canada, 1984) is a good guide for using Canadian resources. Although many documents are housed in foreign repositories, some city directories, census abstracts, and newspapers and periodicals are available in local libraries.

Records of Anti-Slavery Societies, Vigilance Committees, Benevolent Groups, and Churches

While these sources sometimes provide information about specific cases, they are often more useful for establishing historical context and locating names, dates, and events which can be documented in other primary sources and used to construct rich narratives about individuals and groups associated with historic sites. In addition, because a good number of these societies were organized and run by African Americans and women, membership lists and meeting notes often provide documentation about individuals not clearly identified in census records or city directories.

Many formal organizations such as the American Anti-Slavery Society, the Society of Friends (Quakers), regional abolitionist groups such as the Philadelphia Committee of Vigilance and New York Vigilance Committee, and local women's anti-slavery groups published minutes of their meetings, annual reports, and collections of propaganda materials. These sources can often be found in local libraries and archival collections. Although lesser known and sometimes more covert organizations and vigilance committees also published some of their records, identifying and locating information from these groups may take a bit more detective work in public and private collections. It may be useful to ask individual churches and historical societies about any such records in their collections.

Contemporary Newspapers and Periodicals

Just as in today's society, nineteenth-century newspapers and periodicals contain a wealth of information about day-to-day living conditions, historical events, people and places, popular opinion,

and major national and international social issues. In the mid-nineteenth century, popular publications contain a great deal of information, sometimes speculative, about fugitive slaves, their accomplices, and general anti-slavery activities. Many abolitionist presses published reports about fugitive slaves, including accounts of successful and failed escape attempts, updates about legislation relating to slavery and fugitive slaves, reports about regional enforcement of slave laws and black codes, proceedings of anti-slavery meetings, and sometimes even reports about the status of the Underground Railroad. Mainstream newspapers often cited and sometimes re-interpreted these sources in their own publications, and may contain references to names, dates, events, and locations mentioned in fugitive and abolitionist accounts. In addition, printing establishments which published anti-slavery material during the ante-bellum period were often likely to have been actively connected to abolitionist activities. Gathering information about materials published by various presses can often lend insight into their role in local anti-slavery efforts.

American Newspapers, 1821-1936: A Union List of Files Available in the United States and Canada (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1937) is a useful guide for locating these sources. Many major newspapers such as the *New York Times* have published indexes for information in some nineteenth century editions, and some have separate listings for obituaries and biographical information. Sources such as Lubomyr and Anna Wynar's *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Ethnic Newspapers and Periodicals* and *Negro Periodicals in the United States* are useful as well, and researchers should check listings for locally published periodicals from church groups, social clubs, political organizations, and professional groups. Libraries and archives often have collections of nineteenth-century local and regional newspapers and periodicals on microfilm.

Legal Documents and Court Records

Although legendary accounts of the Underground Railroad imply that the majority of fugitive slaves were able to reach and remain in free territories, a great number of people who attempted

to escape were captured and returned to slavery, along with their assistants, who were frequently fined and sometimes detained in jail. Local and appelate courts tried many cases relating to fugitive slaves, and information can be obtained from the records of these cases. More information may come from state penitentiaries where accomplices were held, documents from local anti-slavery groups supporting these prisoners, and newspaper accounts of legal events. Many collections of legal papers also include descriptions of buildings and properties and specialized maps recorded for real estate transactions or disputes.

Several sources which include information about cases related to the Underground Railroad include Paul Finkleman's *Fugitive Slaves and American Courts: the Pamphlet Literature* (1988) and *Slavery in the Courtroom: An Annotated Bibliography of American Cases* (1985), and Helen Catterall's *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro* (1968). In addition, many legal records pertaining to fugitive slaves are housed in local law libraries and archives.

Manuscript Collections

Personal and family manuscript collections often include diaries, correspondence, newspaper clippings, record books, photographs or images, and ephemera from the period. Archived business and institutional files are more likely to contain financial and legal documents, official correspondence, membership lists, and institutional histories. Because libraries are not apt to have collections conveniently catalogued under "Underground Railroad," it is useful to have the names of specific individuals before searching through manuscript collections. Researchers of historic sites should pay particular attention to family and organizational collections directly connected to the site and comb these sources for any information related to slaves and slavery, the anti-slavery movement, and nineteenth-century social and political conditions. One of the most practical ways to locate personal collections is through the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections*, a massive index of collections held throughout the nation. More and more, lists of manuscripts appear on the internet by theme and by holding institution.

Maps

Contemporary nineteenth-century maps are important in research about individual Underground Railroad sites. As noted before, successful escapes from slavery depended on a wide variety of conditions. Geographical boundaries, demographic information, specific addresses and property owners, locations of abolitionist presses and societies, railroads, waterways, roads and trails, the position of military posts, origins of advertisements for runaway slaves, and the sites of landmark court cases and historical events can reveal connections between people in different regions and lend great insight into how complicated conditions shaped fugitives' experiences and influenced locally organized efforts to assist them. Because of this, it is important to know something about nineteenth-century American geography in order to determine how particular historic sites fit into the larger picture.

Researchers seeking to find routes have often used the accounts in Wilber Siebert, slave memoirs, and those found in William Still's *The Underground Railroad* (1872) in which fugitives who met with him in Philadelphia related how they arrived there. This has meant that most primary destinations described in print are near the office of a Vigilance Committee. It may be that travel by river, bay and ocean has not been sufficiently appreciated. Another strategy is to use the compiled accounts of runaway slave notices edited and published in book form. Quite often, the masters of fugitive slaves knew with some accuracy the direction in which runaways were headed and described their likely means of escape in the advertisement. Boatmen were very frequently cautioned in those advertisements against aiding runaways and many slaves did, indeed, escape by water.

Different types of maps offer various sorts of clues about the past: Contemporary national maps of the United States, Canada, and Mexico often show territorial, state, and local boundaries, natural features, and distances between locations. Look for other historical clues on individual maps as well, such as population figures (often divided into slave and free, by state) and transportation routes (railways, steamship routes, stage roads). Note how

place names are spelled, as these sometimes changed throughout history.

City directories often include specially-made city maps in their annual publications. Usually located at the beginning or end of the directory, these maps are fairly reliable sources of city streets, public buildings, homes, businesses, and transportation routes.

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, insurance companies began producing fire insurance maps for home and business owners. The Sanborn company produced these maps throughout the nation from the mid-1800s through 1950. While most of these maps were drawn after the Underground Railroad ceased to operate, they provide useful clues about building structures and dimensions, property ownership, and neighborhood characteristics. Although *Fire Insurance Maps in the Library of Congress: Plans of North American Cities and Towns Produced by the Sanborn Map Company* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1981) is specific to the Library of Congress, it is a helpful for finding out what maps are available.

"Bird's eye" maps of cities and towns are useful for getting the "feel" for a large area at a certain time and for identifying building characteristics, locations, neighborhoods, and spatial relationships. These maps are often not-to-scale and are sometimes creatively adapted; use them with caution, but use them.

Spirituals

Both African American slave spirituals and popular anti-slavery songs are important elements of Underground Railroad legend and history. What are the traditions and practices of music in West Africa which were incorporated in North America ? Traditional interpretations of "the music of the Underground Railroad" often focus of the use of slave spirituals as covert communication. "Chariot's a' Coming" purportedly announced the arrival of a "conductor" on the premises, "Good News, Neighbor" was apparently used to report a fugitive's safe arrival in free territory, and the ever-popular "Follow the Drinking Gourd" was supposedly an

encrypted song which directed slaves, by way of the North Star, along a particular route of the Underground Railroad. Interpreting slave spirituals in this way, however, is tricky business. Coded language is difficult or impossible to document, and while many slave spirituals have a variety of interpretations, not every one referred to fugitive slaves. The most recent scholarly interpretations about connections between African American slave music and the Underground Railroad take these complex factors into consideration. By concluding that the adaptation of traditional music to current social conditions was a common practice in American slave communities, researchers may understand that slave spirituals may have been but were not necessarily used to relay information about fugitive slaves and escape from slavery. African American slave music was, in historian Lawrence Levine's words, a "distinctive cultural form" which was a vital part of slave life, society, and resistance.

Interpreting Underground Railroad Research

By creatively combining information from a variety of primary and secondary sources, developing in-depth biographies and histories of people and sites, and drawing conclusions about their relationship to surrounding areas and nineteenth-century American history, researchers can shed light on these and other questions. Responsible interpretations of the Underground Railroad should:

- Separate Underground Railroad myths and legends from historical facts about the escapes and resettlement of fugitive slaves and the actual activities of individuals and organizations.

- Document the factual elements of the Underground Railroad through primary source materials and connect them to broader historical issues of slavery, abolition, and American history.

- Evaluate the legendary elements of the Underground Railroad and consider the history and value of oral narratives. What are the sources of local legends? How can we use them to explore the differences and connections between historical myth and historical reality?

Good historical interpretation - particularly of a complex issue like the Underground Railroad - is grounded in careful, thoughtful research. After researching a site and constructing an interpretation of its connection to the Underground Railroad, researchers should double-check their sources and have other researchers review the interpretations. In addition, it may be useful to ask:

- Does the interpretation help the public better understand the multi-faceted development, organization, and history of the Underground Railroad?

- Does the interpretation include information about the activities of "ordinary" individuals and groups as well as popular or famous people?

- Does the interpretation present undocumented or debatable information as historical fact?

- Does the interpretation reflect that both historical and legendary information are elements of the history of the Underground Railroad?

- Are interpretations based on information from a variety of reliable sources which reflect the complex nature of the Underground Railroad?

- Does the interpretation include historical information about the events and conditions preceding and following escapes from slavery?

- Are contemporary political, economic, and social issues incorporated into narratives of Underground Railroad activities?

- Does the interpretation reflect the influence of religion, African cultural beliefs and practices, benevolent organizations, anti-slavery societies and vigilance committees, community networks, and individual efforts where appropriate?

- Have rich and well-documented biographies and histories been constructed for sites and individuals included in the interpretation?

- Is the interpretation representative and inclusive of all individuals significant to the story ?

- Can the area, site, or person be connected to Underground Railroad activities through primary sources?

- Does evidence about the area, site, or person make it more appropriate for interpreting related issues of slavery and abolition and linking the concept of the Underground Railroad to other themes in nineteenth-century American history?

- Are music, literature, contemporary broadsides and propaganda, and local legends researched and interpreted as part of the history of the Underground Railroad? Can these sources be connected to the site, or are they more appropriate for establishing a historic context for Underground Railroad activities?

PART III

TRACKING ESCAPE: A CASE STUDY

The Hill Family in Slavery, Freedom, & Transition

The following study of the Hill family illustrates the possibilities for documenting cases of Underground Railroad activity and reinterpreting its significance in American history. This account is not simply an isolated story about fugitives, but a complex history of how one family of slaves and free blacks struggled over a number of years to free some members from slavery. This story, which neither begins nor ends with their Underground Railroad experiences, includes information about slavery in ante-bellum southern Virginia, the effort to resettle in free territory, and for some individuals, the decision to return to the United States from Canada after the Civil War. Creating a narrative of these experiences reveals how the Hills were connected to broad historical patterns in American and Canadian history, and provides clues about the organized and informal networks of northern and southern slaves, free blacks, and sympathetic whites which were crucial in their escape and resettlement.

The Narrative

The Hill family in Virginia, 1830-1861

John Henry (b. 1827-1832), James, and Hezekiah (b. 1824-1829) Hill were members of a family of slaves and free blacks who lived in Richmond and Petersburg, Virginia during the mid-nineteenth century. These three men, all slaves, were connected to several of Petersburg's many free blacks and a number of slaves and whites in southern Virginia. By 1853 John Henry Hill (then owned by John Mitchell of Petersburg) was a carpenter in his early twenties, married to a free black woman, Rose McCrae, (b. 1829-

1832), and had two young children who were also free. According to the 1872 account of William Still, Rose's father, Jack McCrea (sometimes McCrary or McCray) was a "very well to do" free man living in Petersburg. We know very little about John's younger brother James, other than that he was a slave in Richmond during the 1840s and 1850s. The Hills' uncle Hezekiah, married with two children by 1856, was owned by a man in Petersburg and, like his nephew John and numerous other slaves, hired out to another in the city.

Although John never mentioned his father in his correspondence, he frequently made reference to his mother in Richmond and a relative, John M. Hill, in Petersburg. John M. Hill was free to go to Richmond to visit John's mother, and corresponded frequently with northern and southern abolitionists. Information in the correspondence suggests that the Hills were part of a close network of family, friends, and acquaintances in northern and southern black and white communities.

Interpreting From Sources: These family relationships are referred to both in letters from members of the Hill family to William Still and in correspondence found in the Colson-Hill family papers. Although the 1850 censuses for Petersburg and Richmond do not list slaves by name, the only slave-owning John Mitchell in the area owned thirteen slaves, including one twenty-three year old black male. This correlates well with John Henry Hill's age in the 1870 census and on information in family letters which indicate he was between twenty-one and twenty-six when he escaped from slavery in 1853. Although John Henry Hill does not reveal the name of his wife in his letters, he is married in 1870 to "Rosell" Hill. We know from his letters to Still that his wife's father was named John (or Jack) McCrae, and the only free black male of that name and of a viable age listed in the Petersburg census in 1850 was a French-born carpenter with a property value of $4600. At that time, eighteen year old "Rose" McCrae lived with him, as did eleven year old Martha - a child referenced some years later in a letter from John McCrae to his "daughter Marthy," located in the Colson-Hill family papers. Whether Mr. McCrea donated money to John Henry Hill"s escape is unclear, but

evidence suggests that John remained in contact with him after settling in Canada in the 1850s.

Like most of the industrial, commercial, or trade centers of the mid-nineteenth century, Petersburg's citizens were well informed about local, national, and international events. Most American cities had several daily or weekly papers in addition to the publications put out by the local churches and the temperance society. Those circulating in Petersburg at this time included *The Virginia Gazette*, the *Petersburg Intelligencer*, also known as the *Intelligencer and Commercial Advertiser*, popular during the 1840s, the *Republican*, the *Southside Democrat*, the *Press*, the *Daily Express*, and the *Kaleidoscope*, an 1850s temperance paper created by Mrs. Rebecca Brodnax. Many residents also received the *Niles' Weekly Register*, a Baltimore paper published during the first half of the nineteenth century which focused on business and internal improvements.

While anti-slavery sentiments were less visible in the South than in abolitionist centers such as Philadelphia or Boston, northern news found its way into Virginia papers, and sometimes even through the mail. Rumors that underground railroad agents were trying to "entice Negroes from their owners" circulated throughout the population. Such news, both real and imagined, was often used in various ways by pro-slavery advocates to discredit antislavery activities and intentions. In addition, slave owners were well aware that rumors of successful fugitives circulated in the slave communities, and owners often tried to discourage their slaves from attempting to escape to Canada. From that country, John Henry Hill was quick to dispel the inaccurate accounts. "Our masters have told us that there is no living in Canada for a Negro but if it may Please your gentlemanship to publish these facts that we are here able to earn our bread and money enough to make us comftable."

While we cannot establish, as William Still claimed, that John Hill's owner intended to sell him because he was "a dangerous piece of property to keep," the decades preceding John's escape from Virginia were characterized by increasing tension about slavery. Pro- and anti-slavery debates, rumors of the underground

railroad, reports about fugitive slaves, and the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850 all heightened concerns in southern Virginia. From 1831 throughout the 1850s, even as Richmond politicians adopted liberal new clauses for universal white male suffrage, elected officials, and public schooling, city laws concerning the education and assembly of free blacks and slaves became more stringent. In addition, Richmond and Petersburg were in close proximity to several of the major disturbances during the period - Gabriel's conspiracy in 1800, Nat Turner's Southampton Rebellion in 1831, an escape attempt by local slaves and John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859 all occurred relatively near the Petersburg area, and local white militia units were often mustered for defense. The five fugitives caught escaping on the *Keziah*, in fact, were Petersburg slaves, and their attempted escape was quite a newsworthy event. Even from Canada, John Henry Hill was aware of this escape attempt and remained concerned about the condition of Virginia slaves and free blacks.

The Hill family in transition, 1853-1861

Although we cannot establish that members of the Hill family made any sort of organized plan to escape from slavery, John Henry, James, and Hezekiah Hill and their families were key figures in a series of escapes from southern Virginia to the northern United States and Canada during the 1850s. Evidence suggests that the escapes referenced in the Hills' correspondence reveal only a small portion of this migration network. Our knowledge about the Hill family's experiences as fugitive slaves begins on January 1, 1853, when John Henry Hill escaped from his owner, John Mitchell, as he was about to be sold at a public auction in Richmond. According to John's letters to William Still, he remained hidden by a friend of his mother's in Virginia for nine months before he was able to obtain passage on a ship, *The City of Richmond*, to Philadelphia. From here, John traveled by road, rail, and boat through Pennsylvania and New York to Hamilton, Canada West, where he lived for several years. Although his wife and children did not accompany him at this time, they joined him in Canada later that year, and in 1855, the family moved to Toronto.

In September of 1854, John reminded William Still that he "will have been free twelve months." As demonstrated here, his claims are consistent with the story of hiding out for almost nine months until September, 1853. After breaking away from his owner in January of 1853, John Henry Hill remained hidden in the city of Richmond for several months, until he "got tired of staying in that place." He then apparently forged himself a pass to Petersburg, where he remained hidden with a "prominent Colored person" until several friends warned him that he was at risk of being discovered. On September 12th or 13th, eight months and a few weeks after his initial escape, John boarded the steamship *City of Richmond* to Philadelphia. (His "conductor" paid $125 to secure him a private cabin on the boat.) He stayed in Philadelphia for several days and "put out" for Canada on Friday (September 17). From Philadelphia, he traveled one day to an undisclosed location in New York, where he remained for the weekend. He traveled in New York for two days through Albany and Rochester, traveled a short distance the next day, and spent the night (Thursday, September 29) in Lewiston. From here, he took a boat and arrived in Toronto on Friday, September 30th. While John was "on the run" for nine months, his actual journey through the United States to Toronto lasted only two and a half weeks.

Over the next three years, by corresponding with members of the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee, John actively followed the progress of other slaves and free blacks attempting to flee from Virginia to Canada. James Mercer, a fugitive slave who had been owned by Louise White in Virginia and hired out to a Richmond merchant, was in frequent contact with John in Hamilton. Although James Mercer had left his wife and child in slavery, they were able to join him in Canada in January of 1855. Although John does not mention Mercer's travel partner William Gilliam, a Virginia slave, a letter from Gilliam to William Still references his connection to James Mercer. During this period, another fugitive from Norfolk named Isaac Forman was living in Toronto and tried without success to bring his wife, a slave in Richmond, to Canada. John Henry Hill and John Hall, another fugitive from Virginia who had arrived in Canada in 1856, tried repeatedly to secure safe passage north for a Petersburg man named Willis Johnson.

For three years, both John Hall and John Henry Hill corresponded with the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee in an attempt to arrange transportation for Willis Johnson, a slave hiding in Richmond, Virginia. In one letter, Hall informed Still that Johnson could be found at the corner of Fushee and Grace Streets "in the house of one Mr. Rutherford. There is several Rutherford in the neighborhood, there is a church call'd the third Baptist church, on the R.H. side going up Grace Street, directly opposite the Baptist church at the corner, is Mrs. Meads Old School at one corner, and Mr. Rutherfords is on the other corner. He can be found out by seeing Fountain Tombs who belongs to Mr. Rutherford and if you should not see him, there is James Turner who lives at the Governors, Please to see Captain Bayliss and tell him to take these directions and go to John Hill, in Petersburg, and he may find him."

Interpreting From Sources: Aspects of Richmond/Petersburg's underground railroad connections became apparent in researching the Hill family. The 1850 census (free inhabitant schedule) for Richmond City was consulted first. Although several "Rutherfords" were indeed listed in the same general vicinity, as John Henry Hill suggested, the 1856 Richmond city directory lists a William Rutherford at the "s.w. cor. Grace and Foushee." Referring back to the census, we find that the only William Rutherford in Richmond was a forty-seven year old merchant with a small family and $8000 worth of property. William Rutherford owned ten slaves, two of which were twenty-one year old males and one may have been Fountain Tombs. James Turner could not be positively identified or placed. Contemporary maps reveal that Hall's directions to the Rutherford's were accurate. Mrs. Ann Meade is listed in the 1856 Richmond directory as the head of a "female school, s. e. cor. Grace and Foushee." The history of this establishment is detailed in *Old Richmond Neighborhoods*. This source also claims that Third Baptist Church was rebuilt three times on this same location - an important consideration for its interpretation as an original historic site. The 1860 city directory lists the Third Baptist at the Corner of Grace and Foushee, and provides information about its pastor and activities. The church is identified on one city map as the "Grace Street Baptist" and on another as

the Third Baptist. John Hill is the relative of John Henry Hill, already in Canada. Other underground activities of Captain Bayliss, a white ship's captain, are documented in correspondence, court records, and newspaper accounts.

Among this group of mid-century fugitive immigrants from southern Virginia was John's uncle, Hezekiah Hill. Hezekiah, who had attempted to buy and was cheated out of his freedom several times, staged an impromptu escape from a Petersburg slave trader in 1856. Like his nephew, he remained hidden in the area for an extended period of time before obtaining passage to the north through the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee. By this time, John Henry and his family had moved to Toronto, and Hezekiah settled in this city upon arriving in Canada. Once in free territory, he cooperated with John, contacts in Virginia, and the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee in an attempt to bring his nephew James Hill to Canada.

Secreting slaves on north-bound steamers was a common practice throughout the migration period, although even those who had "Underground" connections were not always quite sure how exactly to do it. "There is a way [to send fugitives north] by the N.Y. line," wrote the individual harboring James Hill in Richmond in 1861, "but they are all strangers to me, and of course I could not approach them with this subject for I would be indangered myself greatly.... you might succeed in making an arrangement with those on the New York Steamers for they dose such things but please let me know the man that the arrangement is made with..." It is significant that nearly all of the fugitives from Southern Virginia referenced in this narrative used connections to popular shipping and passenger lines to escape to the north.

John Henry Hill's use of steam transportation, when placed in historical context, is a particularly colorful illustration of how modernization benefited some fugitive slaves:

In 1851, the Norfolk City Directory celebrated the commencement of two new direct steamer lines running between Richmond, Norfolk, and New York. Agents Dean and Thorton in New York

and Ludlam and Watson in Richmond were particularly proud of this new convenient service. The new *City of Richmond* and *City of Norfolk*, each designed to carry 40 cabin and 50 steerage passengers, were primarily intended to further the trade interests of Virginia's "horticulturists" and increase the flow of trade goods between American agricultural and industrial centers. On September 12, 1853, just two years after the lines opened, John Henry Hill was one of many slaves who purportedly escaped from bondage as cabin passengers aboard the *City of Richmond.* A few years later, he referred another would-be fugitive to a white ship's captain via a slave named Esue Foster who worked at Ludlam's warehouse on the waterfront Basin in Richmond. While delivering slaves from bondage could hardly have been the activity which New York line stockholders Josiah Wills and A. Mehaffy intended to invest in, such successful escapes ironically proved that "shipping facilities of this kind [were] plentiful for all kinds of purposes."

Unlike his brother and uncle, however, James did not receive assistance from the Vigilance Committee and remained in hiding in Virginia for an extended period of time before traveling north in 1861. Both he, his Petersburg accomplice, and his relatives in Canada repeatedly requested assistance from northern abolitionists, but communication and financial difficulties impaired the process. After spending three years as a fugitive in Virginia, James somehow made his way to Boston, where he established permanent residence as a free man.

The Hills' fugitive experiences suggest that in the 1850s, many escapes from southern Virginia were neither officially organized nor completely chaotic. No fugitive was passed exclusively between card-holding members of vigilance committees, nor did they travel furtively at night between "stations" run by anonymous white Quakers who lit lanterns to announce their establishments. Rather, John Hill and his uncle Hezekiah were secreted for long periods of time by both black and white friends, communicated (sometimes through a third party) with members of vigilance committees to arrange their transportation, took advantage of connections in free black communities in both the north and south, and were assisted by black and white mariners and local

laborers. Their sympathizers and accomplices could not simply send the Hills to the next known "station," but had to wait for verification from trusted contacts that it was safe for them to travel and that firm arrangements had been made for their accommodation. The Hills' escapes, while somewhat impromptu, were enabled by localized and interconnected networks which functioned over a wide geographic area from the 1850s to the 1860s - networks which John Henry Hill referred to as the "Underground Railroad". These networks not only contributed to the success of several escapes, but enabled John Henry Hill to remain active in the anti-slavery movement and connected to his Virginia relations even after he settled in Canada.

Using The Sources: A careful reading of the Hill's correspondence reveals that this merchant was located at the corner of 7th and Franklin Streets in Richmond. An initial scan of the advertisements and business listings in the Richmond city directory for 1860 yielded several viable leads. In 1860, a shoemaker identified only as "Bauman" was the only inhabitant listed at that exact location. The federal census for that same year lists both Prussian-born Jacob Bauman, a dry goods merchant, and German-born J. H. Bauman, a shopkeeper, living in Richmond. While neither can be positively identified as Still's underground contact, the census also lists a twenty-three year old man named William C. Mayo at J. H. Bauman's address. In several 1856 letters to William Still, John Hill's friend, John Hall, references a William C. Mayo of Richmond, Virginia. While this would have made Mr. Mayo 19 years old at the time that Hall was depending on him to make covert travel and shipping arrangements, the high correlation between these sources suggests a possible connection between the Hills, Halls, and J. H. Bauman. It is also thus possible that Bauman's wife Elizabeth, 42 years old in 1860, was the "friend" of Hill's mother who secreted John in 1853, though at least one other adult woman lived in the house as well.

The Hill family in Canada and the United States, 1853-1872

Slavery had been abolished in the British Empire in 1834. While Canadian society was far from egalitarian, it was free. In

the words of John Henry Hill, "not free for the white man but for all," and thus dramatically different from the slave society from which the Hills escaped. Scattered reports of his involvement in local churches, anti-slavery and Underground Railroad activities, newspaper publications, and a local militia unit support his claim that blacks who worked to establish themselves could do so, and that they enjoyed far more respect than in the United States. Both John Henry and Hezekiah Hill were members of the Queen Victoria's Rifle Guards, a black militia company organized in Canada West.

John Henry Hill may given "thanks be to God" that he settled in Canada particularly because he arrived in Hamilton at such an opportune moment: a sudden in-migration of large numbers of Western Europeans and a smaller number of African Americans spurred growth which placed skilled workmen like Hill in high demand.

In 1853, John Henry Hill declared that he never expected to see his friends in the United States again. After the Civil War, however, he, his family, and his uncle Hezekiah joined many other ex-fugitives in a return migration to the United States. Re-establishing themselves as free people in the city where John had once been a slave, the Hills raised a large family and maintained their contacts to Mrs. Hill's relatives. The 1870 census, in fact, reported that twenty-two year old Martha McCrae, possibly Rose's sister mentioned ten years before in family correspondence, was living with the Hills. His listing in the 1879 Petersburg city directory suggests that John Henry continued to work as a carpenter and may have served as a justice of the peace in that town. Hezekiah also returned to Virginia, but settled instead in Buena Vista Township, where he lived in 1870 with a fifteen year old named Wilberforce Hill, who was at that time apprenticed to a carpenter.

This review of one escape from Virginia to Canada only suggests the resources available. There is more to be known about the Hill family and their contacts. We can know more if we use the resources available. The following is not a comprehensive list of sources, but an example of the kinds of sources which can be

used in research. These sources not only contained evidence of the Hill family's experiences, but raised questions, revealed themes, and suggested directions often encountered in Underground Railroad research.

The history of the Hill family was compiled and documented from a variety of primary and secondary sources, including correspondence from the Colson-Hill family papers housed at Virginia State University; William Still, *The Underground Railroad* (1872); the Works Progress Administration, *The Negro in Virginia* (1941); Samuel G. Howe, *The Refugees from Slavery in Canada West* (1864); C. Peter Ripley, *The Black Abolitionist Papers, volumes II: Canada, 1830-1865 and III: United States, 1830-1848* (1986); James Scott and Edward Wyatt, *Petersburg's Story: A History* (1960); Edward Pollock, *Historical and Industrial Guide to Petersburg, Virginia* (1884); Emily Salmon, *The Hornbook of Virginia History* (1994); Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (1971); Michael Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth-Century City* (1975); Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accomodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848* (1988); Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (1997); Tommie Bogger, *Free Blacks in Norfolk, Virginia: The Darker Side of Freedom* (1997); federal census records for Richmond and Petersburg, Virginia for 1840, 1850, 1860, and 1870; J. H. Chataigne, *Petersburg Directory for 1879-1880*; W. E. Ferslew, *Second Annual Directory for the City of Richmond* (1860), *Brown's Toronto General Directory* (1856); W. Forrest, *Norfolk Directory for 1851-1852*; Frederick Terrill, *Chronology of Montreal and Canada, with Calendars A.D. 1752-1925* (1893-); Richard Edwards, *Statistical Gazetteer of the State of Virginia* (1854); Henry Rogers, *General Map of the United States* (1857); M. Ellyson, *Map of the City of Richmond, Henrico County, Virginia* (1856); J. Keily, *Map of the City of Richmond* (1853); Sanborn Fire Insurance Map for Richmond; Rand McNally's Indexed Railroads and County Maps of Virginia (1883); Peter Gross, *Bird's Eye View of Toronto* (1876); J Rapkin, *Map of West Canada* (1845); *McElroy's Philadelphia Directory* (1851); *The Hamilton Spectator*; and the *Toronto Daily Globe* (1856).

A REVIEW OF SOURCES

In popular works of history and fiction written about the Underground Railroad, there were often hair-breadth escapes and secret tunnels. Many books and articles were inspired by romantic legends collected as local narratives. These popular works varied in their reliability and a search for original sources is the best guarantee of accuracy. The most extensive collected primary sources of that era are found in Wilbur Siebert, *The Underground Railway from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1898) and William Still, *The Underground Railroad* (reprint ed. Arno Press: New York, 1968/orig. ed. Phila., 1872). Siebert gathered documents and reminiscences from aged abolitionists or their descendants in the 1890s. Still, an active participant in the Philadelphia Underground Railroad, used his notes, correspondence, and memory after the Civil War to attempt to reconstruct each narrative for publication.

In the early- to mid-twentieth century, much of the research on fugitives from slavery and the history of slavery was the work of scholars such as Benjamin Quarles, W.E.B. DuBois, Carter G. Woodson and Herbert Aptheker. It appeared in the *Journal of Negro History* which began publication in 1916 under the editorship of Carter G. Woodson and which often provided a venue for the publication of excellent scholarship on African American life in the decades before 1970 when the official American history journals were almost closed to that topic. A classic overview is John Hope Franklin and Alfred Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill Publishing Company, 1994.) Although intended as a genealogical resource, Charles Blockson's *Black Genealogy* (reprint ed., Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1991) is also a valuable source for the Underground Railroad.

Works by Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York: Vintage Press, 1956) and

Stanley Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1959) saw slavery as harsh, and, in Elkins' case, as robbing the enslaved of a sense of self. These two books sparked a generation of research, beginning in the 1960s, which examined every aspect of the system of slavery and generally concluded that slavery, although deeply damaging to the African American, did not destroy the possibility of independent thought and action.

Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (reprint ed. 1996 Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996/orig. ed. Lex.,1961) is a serious attempt to separate the myth from the reality of the underground railroad. His first and last chapters are an account of exaggerated and romanticized texts and newspaper accounts and they are worth checking to avoid reliance on dubious and unsubstantiated texts.

Since Gara's book was written, the 1930s WPA oral histories of slavery and the fugitive slave memoirs of the late antebellum era (1830-1860) have been finecombed for references to runaways and the underground railroad. While the abolitionists were the primary publishers of slave narratives and memoirs, about one-half of the six thousand slave narratives were preserved by five other sources of publication: the court record, the popular or sensational journal, the church record, the independendent printer, and the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration. These collections are described in Marion Wilson Starling, *The Slave Narrative: Its Place in American History* (Washington, D.C.:Howard University Press, 1988). A mass of testimony from ex-slaves, gathered by un- and under-employed writers working for the Federal Writers' Project in the Works Project Administration during the 1930s, has been published in George Rawick's *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Company, 1972). This multi-volume compilation of over 3,500 interviews with ex-slaves from 26 states was supplemented in 1981 by Donald Jacob's *Index to The American Slave*, a comprehensive finding aid which lists the volume and page number for slaves by name, state, and thematic subjects, including runaway slaves, the Underground Railroad, abolitionism,

slave music and songs, and resistance to slavery. Many of the accounts of slavery and escape published since about 1970, such as John Blassingame's *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977) and George Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of a Black Community* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972), have come from those sources.

Other useful sources for understanding slave memoirs are Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds., *The Slave's Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), R.J.M. Blackett, *Beating Against the Barriers: Biographical Essays in Nineteenth-Century Afro-American History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), and Gilbert Osofsky, ed., *Puttin' on Ole Massa* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969). These editors note which fugitive memoirs were written by the fugitive, which were told to an editor or amanuensis, which were edited much later, which were entirely false, and which were changed substantially between one edition and the other. Recent useful collections of slave narratives, letters, speeches, editorials and newspaper accounts are Peter C. Ripley, et al., eds. *The Black Abolitionist Papers* 5 vol. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985-93) and Charles Blockson, *The Underground Railroad* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1987).

An excellent place to begin the history of antislavery in North America is Merton Dillon, *Slavery Attacked: Southern Slaves and their Allies, 1619-1865* (Baton Rouge, 1990). Overviews of the abolitionists may be found in James Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* and Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969). The best summary of the philosophical development of antislavery in the Western tradition is David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

The religious impulse in antislavery usually begins in the mid-eighteenth century with the Society of Friends (Quakers) in England and America who began to view slavery as an evil. Although they were not the only religious group to struggle against

slavery, they became the best known. For an account of their spiritual journey, see Jean Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) and Hugh Barbour, et. al., *Quaker Crosscurrents: Three Hundred Years of Friends in the New York Yearly Meeting* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995). Roger Bruns, ed., *Am I Not a Man and a Brother ? The Antislavery Crusade of Revolutionary America* (New York: Chelsea House, 1977) contains a collection of the primary documents condemning colonial slavery from the Germantown Friends' Protest Against Slavery (1688) to the debate at the Constitutional Convention (1787).

The religious debate over slavery caused denominational divisions and the development of Biblical arguments for and against slavery. The rise of evangelical Protestantism at the same time as Enlightenment-based arguments for American independence and liberty are explored in such books as Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for The Institute of Early American History and Culture,1982). Three excellent books on the development of a black theology and cosmos rooted in both Christianity and slavery are Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution* (New York: Oxford University Press. 1978); Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin' On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979); and Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974). Denominational histories of American Protestantism recount the development of their theology over slavery and note the point in history at which they split into southern and northern sects over that issue. For an overview, see Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977) and Samuel S. Hill, Jr. *The South and the North in American Religion* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1980).

Useful overviews of the changing interpretations of slavery and of black life in the south include Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery: 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); Peter Parish, *Slavery: History and Historians.* New York: Harper and Row, 1989. John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation*

Life in the Antebellum South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), argues that slaves were able to overcome many of the obstacles that were designed to keep them separate from each other and dependent on the masters, as does Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976.) The creation and persistence of African American cultural identity is discussed in Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Thought from Slavery to Freedom* New York, 1977, and Thomas Weber, *Deep Like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Community, 1831-1865.*

For the operation of the underground railroad in the North, see Chapter 3 "Links to Bondage" in James Oliver Horton, *Free People of Color: Inside the African-American Community* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993). For the black experience in Canada, see " A Bibliography Relating to African Canadian History " (rev. ed., 1990), compiled by Hilary Russell, Historical Research Branch, National Historic Sites Directorate, Parks Canada; Michael Wayne, "The Black Population of Canada West on the Eve of the American Civil War: A Reassesment Based on the Manuscript Census of 1861," *Histoire Social/Social History* 28/56 (November 1995); Allen P. Stouffer, *The Light of Nature and the Law of God: Antislavery in Ontario, 1833-77* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1992.) Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queens, 1971) is a classic in the field and the recent Gary Collison, *Shadrach Minkins: From Fugitive Slave to Citizen* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) has much about Canada in its story of Minkins.

An excellent primary source is the multi-volume study entitled *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro*, edited by Helen T. Catteral (Washington: Carnegie Institution, 1926 29). Catteral has abstracted all the court cases concerning slavery until 1866 and related cases until 1875. Many of these cases concern fugitive slaves and her abstract permits the reader to find and read the entire case. Since her work, other scholars have abstracted other aspects of the law and the slave codes. These are an excellent source for local research.

Slave insurrection or revolt was never successful in the United States and was often betrayed before it began. Herbert Aptheker's *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: International Publishers, 1943), is often criticized for his tendency to accept all evidence for slave revolt, but is massively comprehensive. Useful studies of organized rebellion include Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), Stephen Oates, *The Fires of Jubilee: Nat Turner's Fierce Rebellion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), and Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 Through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Knopf, 1974). David Walker's *Appeal*, an angry and eloquent indictment of slavery by a black man whose writing influenced northern antislavery and prompted southern reaction, is available in several edited editions: Herbert Aptheker, ed. *One Continual Cry: David Walker's Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World (1829-1830): Its Setting, Its Meaning.* (New York: Humanities Press, 1965) and, in the same year, Charles Wiltse, ed. David Walker, *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1965.) A recent and very useful book is Peter Hinks, *"To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren"* (State College, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

During the Civil War, thousands of slaves left their homes for the Union lines. These "contraband," as they came to be known, sought work with the Union Army or attempted to pass through the lines to freedom on the the other side. Their story may be found in Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie Rowland, eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-67*, Series II, *The Black Military Experience* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

The local historian attempting to research the underground railroad in a particular region will find much useful information and a context for research in Carol Kammen, *On Doing Local History: Reflections on What Local Historians Do, Why, and What it Means* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press for AASLH, 1986) and David E. Kyvig and Myron A. Marty, *Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You* (reprint ed. Walnut Creek, CA:

Altamira Press, 1996). Beth Savage, ed., *African American Historic Places* (National Park Service: The Preservation Press, 1994) contains many examples of African American sites and a set of essays which place them in context.

For further suggestions about establishing a historical context for historic sites, see the National Register Bulletin No. 16B, *How To Complete the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form.* In addition, there are several useful guides for researching historic properties, including Ann Derry's *Guidelines for Local Surveys: A Basis for Preservation Planning,* National Register Bulletin No. 24 (Washington, DC: National Register of Historic Places, 1977) and National Register Bulletins Nos. 39 (*Researching a Historic Property*) and 32 (*Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Properties Associated with Significant Persons*). See also National Register Bulletin 16A, *How to Complete the National Register Form.* This form provides guidelines on how to document historic properties for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. These bulletins are available from the NRHP/NRHE, 1849 C Street NW, NC400, Washington, D.C. 20240.

Genealogical techniques are extremely useful for creating rich biographies of fugitive slaves, slave-owners, Underground Railroad participants, and their family members and acquaintances. Many published guides offer valuable suggestions for tracing individuals in primary sources materials, including George Everton's *The Handy Book for Genealogists* (1991) and *The Source: A Guidebook of American Genealogy* (1997). Because men and women from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds were involved in Underground Railroad activities, researchers should be familiar with special techniques for locating African Americans, Native Americans, particular ethnic groups, and women in the historical record. Books such as Paula Byers' *African American Genealogy Sourcebook* (1995) and Charles Blockson's *Black Genealogy* (1977) are excellent starting points for this type of research.

No real comprehensive overview of the literature on abolitionism, slavery, and the underground railroad is possible. The most useful approach may be to organize the publications into time

periods. Memoirs of actual participants in these events and biographies by family members or fellow workers appeared from the 1860s through the 1890s. An invaluable source, they bear many of the characteristics of immediacy and partisanship. Studies of the abolitionist era published in the 1950s through the 1970s, and a few earlier, are useful biographies and institutional studies. For the most part, these studies place their theme within national political settings while the studies done since 1975 have a deeper grounding in social and cultural history. A selective list of some of the best of the old studies includes Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History from the Colonial Period to the Outbreak of the Civil War* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1949, 1962); Aileen Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and his Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969); Whitney Cross, *The Burned Over District* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950); Lewis Filler, *The Crusade Against Slavery, 1830-1860* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960); Benjamin Quarles, *Allies For Freedom: Blacks and John Brown* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); Stephen B. Oates, *To Purge this Land With Blood* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970).

Excellent work is being done currently and researachers should be aware of such books as Randolph Paul Runyon, *Delia Webster and the Underground Railroad* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996) and Stuart Seely Sprague, ed., *His Promised Land: The Autobiogray of John P. Parker Former Slave and Conductor on the Underground Railroad* (New York: Norton, 1996) for some of the activity on the Ohio-Kentucky border. Some of the best recent work on related topics includes John R. McKivigan, *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches 1830-1865* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Roy E. Finkenbine, Michael F. Hembree, and Donald Yacovone, eds. *Witness for Freedom: African-American Voices on Race, Slavery, and Emancipation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Robert William Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company,1989); Peter Kolchin *American Slavery, 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); Lewis Perry and Michael

Fellman, *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979); Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horn, *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); Ronald Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Peter Ripley, et al. *Witness for Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

Finally, an indispensable guide to the context of the Underground Railroad is the recently published National Park Service Handbook 156, *The Underground Railroad.*